



The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) recognises that an historic milestone for social work has been reached with the Social Workers Registration Legislation Bill passing Third Reading by a unanimous vote. Registration of social workers was the vision of the late Merv Hancock when he led the establishment of ANZASW in 1964.

ANZASW concurs with Jan Logie, (Green Party) who said “It is a really significant moment in the history of social work in this country, and the implications of this legislation are profound for the profession and, we hope, will have a real impact on the sense of confidence from the public in the social work profession”.

As Minister Sepuloni noted, the Bill “modernises the Social Workers Registration Act and increases the professionalism of the social work workforce,” providing much-needed “certainty” for service users “that people practicing as social workers will have the right qualifications, experience, and on-going professional development to deliver the support that is needed.”

“This development is a corrective to the long history of social work professionals not enjoying the same recognition as Doctors, Nurses, Psychiatrists and others who have required universal registration as a matter of law. As the professional body for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, we look forward to continuing to advocate for social workers’ in the new regulatory environment,” ANZASW Chief Executive Lucy Sandford-Reed said.

“That the majority of the members in the House yesterday recognised the value of the social work profession and the importance of the work undertaken is noted and appreciated,” she added

Long-standing member and outgoing President Shannon Pakura said: “With the passing of this Bill,

ANZASW’s 55 year-old vision of mandatory registration for the whole Social Work profession has finally been realised.”

“We acknowledge the Social Work Alliance group for their steadfast commitment to advocate on behalf the profession. We recognise Minister Sepuloni’s persistence in seeking to pass this legislation and her responsiveness to the profession,” she added.

“This is a bill that puts public safety first and enhances the professionalism of social work,” she noted.

Introducing registration has been a goal for ANZASW since its founding, in 1964. In 1976 members began discussing issues around registration. Our News and Views publication set out the advantages and disadvantages of registration. The advantages included protection for clients and employers, professional development, training, skills development and protection for social workers. The disadvantages were that there were so few professionally qualified social workers eligible for registration that the scheme might undermine “the unqualified in a situation where they are the back-bone of the service” (News and Views, Issue 12, December 1976 p.1).

The campaign for statutory registration accelerated in the nineties, culminating in a report by a Special Project Team on the issue of Statutory Registration which was presented to members in 1999. In 2003 the Social Workers Registration Act introduced voluntary registration. Over the intervening 16 years ANZASW has campaigned to reach the point we are at today.

Recalling the journey, long-time member Dr Kieran O'Donoghue of Massey University said this moment had been achieved as the result "of the endeavour of many committed people in our profession."

"Jenny Blagdon, Madeline Taylor, and Bev Keall renewed this journey for us in 1994, Howard Randal, David McNabb, Buster Curson and Robyn Corrigan, Rose Henderson and Leland Ruwhiu, were key to getting the 2003 Social Workers Registration Act in place. The ANZASW members on the first board Robyn Corrigan, Buster Curson, Sonya Hunt, John Dunlop, Liz Beddoe and Shannon Pakura helped set up our current registration system and laid the groundwork for the move towards Mandatory Registration."

"Other notable allies in the journey have been the Hon Steve Maharey, Sean McKinley and Jan Duke from the SWRB who were key to the 2015 Review of the Act that resulted in the Select Committee Enquiry, while Shayne Walker as the outgoing Chair and Sarah Clark Chief Executive of the Board have helped us across the line. Congratulations to all for their part in achieving this milestone," he continued.

ANZASW life member Robyn Corrigan reflected: "The importance of the Bill has not changed from when the current 2003 legislation was first presented as a Bill by the then Minister for Social Development and Employment, Steve Maharey, its primary purpose being to protect members of the public who engage with social work services by ensuring they are competent and accountable for their practice. That has not changed. Processes may change. The intent does not. This current Bill implements the piece missing from the 2003 legislation, that the registration of social workers becomes mandatory, not voluntary."

"The many reasons for mandatory registration have been discussed and debated both formally and informally within the profession since the 2003 legislation, with arguments both for and against. That mandatory registration is finally on the horizon is the result of strong lobbying from within the profession, particularly from ANZASW," she noted.

She added: "I simply am profoundly moved that it is finally imminent and plan on being in the House to hear the final reading."

The Bill, which, having passed Select Committee, only required Social Workers named as such by their employers to be legally required to register, has been amended so that it is compulsory for all whose role falls within a scope of practice to register with the Board.

The call for scopes of practice was supported by 70% of submitters to the Social Services Select Committee, including the Association. Using a scope of practice (a description of the range of responsibilities, procedures, actions, and processes that a qualified practitioner performs) to define social work is critical to upholding standards, heightening accountability and protecting people using social work services.

A member who took part in ANZASW's consultation and information-gathering process with members prior to its submission said: "The Scope of Practice, when it is finalised, should aim to have a clear definition of social work. With this visibility of social work will result and consumers will have channels made easier for complaint when necessary."

"Many organisations use job descriptions that do not accurately reflect the range of practice that social workers currently provide and therefore hide the value of the profession," the member added.

The Association would like to thank members for their patience during the period of engagement with government and pay tribute to the collaborative approach to developing a Bill that is fit for purpose by the Social Work Alliance (ANZASW, SWRB, PSA Christian Council of Social Services, Social Service Providers Association, National DHB Social Work Leaders Council, Careerforce, Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association, Oranga Tamariki, Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand).



L to R: Shannon Pakura (Chair SWRB), Hon Minister Carmel Sepuloni, Lucy Sandford-Reed (CE ANZASW) Shayne Walker (Immediate Past Chair SWRB)